Rockhampton Girls Grammar School (RGGS) is a regional K–12 girls day/boarding school located in Central Queensland, Australia. Approximately 300 girls study at the school, with 80 in the primary school and 220 in middle and senior schools. About 100 girls live in residence at the school, beginning, on average, at age 13 and coming from rural and remote parts of Queensland, including the Torres Strait, Gulf of Carpentaria, Blackall, the coalfields around Middlemount and Dysart, Moura, Gladstone, and Norfolk Island. Ten percent of the school’s students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and approximately 10 students are from Papua New Guinea. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) measures the cultural, social, and economic advantage of students at the school. The ICSEA of RGGS is 1000, which is the average for Australia.

Background

As of 2015, the academic outcomes of the girls at the school were not meeting expectations, which was deemed detrimental to graduates seeking tertiary (college) entrance. The two most significant sets of data that can provide some measurement of student achievement in Queensland are the Overall Position (OP) for tertiary entrance rank and the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). In both of these measures, the students were underperforming against similar schools and the overall national achievement.

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Implementation

RGGS’s principal became familiar with the work of John Collins in 2014 through a Public Education Foundation–funded course on leadership at Harvard University. In 2016, the Collins Writing Program was implemented, with staff being trained in the key attributes of the program, including the Five Types of Writing. A core group of teachers took charge of implementing in a community of practice. This involved:

- Devotion of 25 minutes in the timetable each week to develop student skills in Type Three Writing and the use of Focus Correction Areas (FCAs)
- Professional development opportunities for staff in two Institutes led by John Collins at the school
- Modelling of key practices by senior teachers and the facilitation of shared classroom practice
- Increasing teacher expertise in elements of the program, including Ten Percent Summary, Compare and Contrast Grids, Vocabulary Cards, and then implementing these strategies as a common, shared practice across the school
- Regular staff meeting time devoted to the development of practice and the development of FCAs to address the new cognitive verbs emphasis in Queensland’s senior assessment program

**Results**

In the three years data has been collected for students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9, there has been a continuing national decline in writing outcomes, but RGGS has been able to improve its results consistently.

Sample Writing Results for Year 5 for RGGS, Queensland, and Australia, 2015–2018

The figures above show just two junctures where the program’s impact can be seen:
- Year 5, where students had more than one year of exposure to the program after 2016
- Year 7, where some students had exposure to the program but other students were new to the school

Our findings were that:
Teachers are easily able to translate the teaching methods employed in the program to students from a broad range of backgrounds.
The impact on results is significant and quick. Students experienced a change in self-perception about their expertise as writers.
In both year levels, the results showed teachers’ ability to raise their schools’ baseline standard of writing above the nation’s and to maintain a positive gap between RGGS results and those of the state and nation.

Highlight data, 2016–2018:

- 2016: RGGS was the only school in Rockhampton to have all students in years 3, 5, and 7 reach the national benchmark in writing. This was the first time the school had achieved this.
- 2017: RGGS’s year 5 was the number one year 5 group in Queensland for writing.
- 80 percent of year 3 students were placed in the Upper 2 Bands.
- RGGS ranked first among like schools in the nation.
- 2018: The school is in the top 1 percent of schools in year 5 writing.
- To date, the school is consistently performing at the highest performance levels for the Central Queensland region.

Summary

Writing instruction is an integral part of a quality program of teaching and learning. Yet in Australia, results for students appear to be in regression according to national testing. The challenge for Rockhampton Girls Grammar School was to develop a response to underperformance that would be easy to translate into classroom practice, be quickly taken up by the students, and lend itself to a shared language around the practice. The Collins Writing Program has done all of these. The strategies work across year levels and content areas. The program allows students to more effectively use metalanguage about writing and to be extremely active in the editing process. After two years of implementation, the school has re-established a raised baseline of expectation and achievement. RGGS has become a leading school in writing performance and outcomes and was recognized in 2018 as a finalist in The Educator “Australian Regional School of the Year.”

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Writing Outcomes for RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017, [https://www.myschool.edu.au/](https://www.myschool.edu.au/) (RGGS is represented by maroon dot.)

**Writing Outcomes for Year 3 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017**

![Graph showing writing outcomes for Year 3 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017.](image1)

**Writing Outcomes for Year 5 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017**

![Graph showing writing outcomes for Year 5 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017.](image2)

**Writing Outcomes for Year 7 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017**

![Graph showing writing outcomes for Year 7 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017.](image3)

**Writing Outcomes for Year 9 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017**

![Graph showing writing outcomes for Year 9 RGGS and Similar Schools, 2017.](image4)